

## **California Women Veterans Leadership Council Recently Established to Support All Women Veterans in the State**

*A newly, developed network of 18 California women Veterans and key organizations plan to promote the needs of women Veterans across the state and elevate issues faced by women Service members and Veterans.*

Sacramento, California ([PRWEB](#)) June 30, 2016 -- As our country celebrates its 240th year of independence, Americans remember our men and women who have served in the Armed Forces to protect and secure the very freedoms our founders sought in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.

Women are now and have always been an important part of securing our freedoms. Two million women nationwide, and 170,000 women in California served in the Armed Forces. However, many do not identify as Veterans. For this reason and others, women are not inclined to access the state and federal Veterans benefits they earned at the same rates as their male counterparts. According to a Veterans Affairs (VA) Women's Health program overview, the VA has found that women Veterans underutilize VA care, largely due to a lack of knowledge about VA benefits and available services and their eligibility to them. Women also experience gaps in services as cited in a women Veteran study conducted by Disabled American Veterans (DAV), which found current reintegration services fail to embrace alternative family structures.

To address this issue, women Veterans, in partnership with Army OneSource, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), and the Women Veterans Alliance, formed a new California Women Veterans Leadership Council. "The CalWVLC is the first opportunity for women Veterans in California to collaborate with each other and use our leadership skills to encourage our continued success through education, advocacy and mentorship. It is exactly what we need to have a collective voice to make sure women who have served are never again forgotten and the benefits we earned are available to us today and in the future," Kristine Hesse, MSgt, U.S. Air Force (Retired), Director of Women Veterans Outreach, National Veterans Foundation.

The mission of the Council is to improve the quality of life of California's women Veterans, including aspects of their education, career success, physical health, and mental well-being. "This Council is long overdue and will work to elevate issues women Veterans face and create positive change for them in California," stated Melissa Washington, Navy Veteran and Chair of the California Women Veterans Leadership Council.

The Council plans to promote the needs of women Veterans across California and heighten awareness of the issues faced by women Service members and Veterans. The Council will accomplish this by creating a statewide structure for information sharing and leadership in order to address the accountability and effectiveness of services and highlight exceptional programs. "The creation of this Council is a very important step to elevate the needs of women Veterans here in the state and helps to ensure that women Veteran leaders communicate with one another about important issues," stated Lindsey Sin, CalVet Deputy Secretary for Women Veterans Affairs and advisor to the Council. The Council will spend their first year educating themselves on the issues that currently affect women Veterans such as increased suicide rates, military sexual trauma, access to female-designated primary care providers, affordable family housing and employment opportunities.

The Council members currently include 18 women Veterans from across California and are scheduled to meet monthly in order to identify statewide solutions to improve the lives of women Veterans. Council leadership

includes Chair, Melissa Washington, Navy Veteran, Women Veteran Alliance; Co-Chair, Kristine Hesse, MSgt, USAF (Retired), Director of Women Veterans Outreach, National Veterans Foundation; Advisor Lindsey Sin, Navy Veteran, Deputy Secretary, Women Veterans Affairs, California Department of Veterans Affairs; and Advisor Patricia Jackson-Kelley, Lt Col, Army (Retired), Los Angeles Military and Veteran Affairs Commissioner and American Legion Department of California Women Veteran Outreach Coordinator. “When forming the Council we intentionally set out to gather a diverse group of women Veteran leaders. The Council is meant to represent all women Veterans regardless of branch, duty status, rank, service era and discharge status,” stated Camara Rajabari, California State Community Support Coordinator, Army OneSource.

For more information about the Council, contact Camara Rajabari, Army OneSource California State Community State Coordinator at 925-222-5934. To learn more about the partnering organizations, visit Army OneSource at [www.MyArmyOneSource.com](http://www.MyArmyOneSource.com); CalVet Department of Women Veteran Affairs at [www.calvet.ca.gov/calvet-programs/women-veterans](http://www.calvet.ca.gov/calvet-programs/women-veterans) and Women Veteran Alliance at [www.womenveteransalliance.org](http://www.womenveteransalliance.org).

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